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Thursday, 26 September 1996, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail . . . . . (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Urbizo Panting (Honduras), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, His Excellency The Honourable Lakshman Kadirgamar.

Mr. Kadirgamar (Sri Lanka): For Sri Lanka it is a matter of particular pride and pleasure that we have a distinguished representative of an Asian country, Malaysia, presiding over the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. Sri Lanka and Malaysia have long enjoyed the warmest ties of friendship. We congratulate the President, and offer him our unstinted support. We also wish to express our appreciation of the contribution made to the success of the historic fiftieth session by His Excellency Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal.

Last year at our Special Commemorative Meeting we pledged to bequeath to the twenty-first century a United Nations equipped, financed and structured to serve effectively the people in whose name it was established. This pledge we must not fail to honour. The peoples of the world will be watching us closely during this session and thereafter to see how well we are proceeding to redeem the promise we made last year in such fine phrases and rhetoric.

The financial constraints confronting the Organization have tempered the once heady enthusiasm among nations for radical reform. Sober pragmatic conclusions now seem inevitable. Yet we must remember that our task, as Sri Lanka's President pointed out last year, is to:

> "enhance the capacity of the United Nations, rather than merely effect economies and scale down its scope." (*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings, 35th meeting, p. 9*)

A viable resource base for the United Nations can be assured not only by effecting greater financial responsibility and sound management, but also, more urgently, by a serious commitment by all Members to honour the financial obligations they are bound to comply with within the terms of the Charter.

We agree that the Secretariat of our Organization needs to be rationalized further. The Organization is now, I believe, sufficiently mature to effect cuts where cuts are due. Programmes affecting developing countries need to be lean, effective and sustainable, which is not the same as saying they should not be touched. Prudent, well-conceived economies could be, and have been, put into effect. We must reform, not deform, the Organization. Above all, the United Nations desperately

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needs a sound financial base. Without that, there will be no prospect of building the streamlined, efficient and effective world Organization that we all dream of. We will merely waste our time and energy building castles in the air.

The working groups on the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and on the strengthening of the United Nations system have made some progress, although no finality has been reached in regard to the main areas of focus. We believe, however, that these efforts should continue. We should redouble our energies to reach consensus.

The main organs of the United Nations, it must be emphasized, will be credible and effective only to the extent that they secure the confidence of the general membership and ensure that their decisions enjoy general acceptance. With regard to the Security Council, it is our view that today's political and economic realities, rather than yesterday's military power, need to be reflected in any decisions to be taken on questions such as that of the permanent membership of the Council and the enlargement of its overall membership.

The United Nations must neither master nor servant be.

First, despite fashionable theories about the need to limit national sovereignty, the members of the Organization remain sovereign, independent States. Each State, however small and weak it may be, jealously guards its sovereignty. Hence, where the United Nations intervenes, it should do so expressly within the terms of the Charter. The consent and cooperation of States are vital to ensure the success of any United Nations endeavour which impinges on the territory of a Member State. Only such an approach would guarantee the safety and security of United Nations personnel and the welfare and interests of the people in the receiving State.

In playing its role in conflict resolution and peacemaking, it is important that our Organization should not stray into domestic issues and conflicts which are within the domestic jurisdiction of the States concerned. The Organization should play its role only with the acceptance of the countries concerned. This position arises from the simple logic that the States concerned are best equipped, in the first instance, to deal with these issues, being familiar with the socio-economic milieu in which they arise. Otherwise, United Nations action could be counter-productive and could lead even to the exacerbation of conflicts. Nor should United Nations mandates be used to serve the interests of any one State or group of States. The United Nations must not be used as a franchise to give legitimacy to causes that may not reflect the general will of the membership, on whose behalf the Security Council should act at all times.

Now more than ever before we must reaffirm our collective respect for the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The smaller nations of the world must receive constant reassurance from the larger nations that their interests will be safeguarded and their sovereignty respected. The smaller nations have only the United Nations to look to for the protection of their national interests.

First, translated into practical terms, developing countries, which are under-represented, need to have their numbers increased in the Security Council. Secondly, there are Member States in the Organization which advance arguments to support permanent seats in the Council no less cogent than the arguments tendered 50 years ago to justify the special status of the current five permanent members.

My delegation also notes the useful discussions that have taken place on the subject of "An Agenda for Peace". We feel that further work needs to be done in this area.

The subject matter of the Agenda for Development is of crucial importance. It underlies the central role of our Organization in the field of economic cooperation and development. While noting the progress that has been achieved in this endeavour, we should reiterate our commitment to move speedily in this area which vitally concerns the economic advancement and stability of developing countries.

I turn now to the problem of terrorism. The epithet "terrorist" has been too often hurled unjustifiably at genuine national liberation movements, those, for instance, which struggled against foreign occupation and apartheid. The legitimacy of such organizations has been recognized by the United Nations. They are organizations which have sat with us here to discuss the issues which had compelled them to armed action. We are happy to see those true movements of the people now occupying seats in this Organization as full Members. We should not spend time seeking to evolve a comprehensive definition of terrorism, lest we become helplessly mired in a semantic minefield. An international consensus

against terrorism, based on the recognition of stark reality, has matured over the years. It is imperative now to implement that consensus.

The world is aware that Sri Lanka has been racked with the anguish of a violent ethnic conflict which has sapped our energies for almost two decades. We have been dealing for many years with an armed group which seeks to dismember our country by violent means, resorting to terrorism as a means of achieving this illegitimate goal. This group — the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) — has been perpetrating a series of terroristic acts, causing death and destruction in many parts of my country. This extremist group does not in any meaningful sense represent the people they claim to fight for. They have never sought a mandate from the people at an election. They have kept out of the democratic mainstream, when many of the minority parties have entered the consultative process to seek redress for their grievances through democratic means.

We are working on a set of proposals introduced by my Government to address minority grievances, which includes far reaching constitutional changes.

The LTTE does not believe in the path of peaceful negotiations, having put their faith in the power of the gun. The peace process, they fear, would marginalize them; hence the recourse to increased violence. We are aware that — in terms of finance, equipment and war *matériel* — this group draws support from persons outside our country, but not from other States. There is not a single State that supports them either in word or deed. They receive support from misguided members of the Tamil community who live and work in the affluent countries, or through extortion, drug trafficking, gun-running, people-smuggling or other illegal activities in many developed countries, in abuse of the hospitality of the host Governments and in violation of their laws.

In Sri Lanka, the terrorists have deliberately targeted civilians. They have bombed a rush-hour commuter train and busy office buildings and have shot up rural villages, causing the death of thousands of innocent civilians, including large numbers of women and children. Many thousands have been injured and maimed. As Sri Lanka's President emphasized last year at the fiftieth-anniversary session, concerted international action is essential to combat terrorism and compel terrorists to renounce violence.

On that occasion President Clinton remarked that no one was immune from terrorism.

The summit meeting of the Group of Seven and Russia in Lyon and the subsequent ministerial meeting on terrorism in Paris took bold initiatives which need to be developed into practical action. The proposals for a convention on terrorist bombings and the proposals to prevent the abuse of asylum and refugee laws are particularly timely initiatives. Sri Lanka looks forward to their elaboration during this session.

Efforts need also to be made to further strengthen and give legal effect to the 1994 Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism. Now we need more than a mere declaration; we need a convention on measures to combat terrorism. Concerted international cooperation is necessary to ensure that the terrorist does not enjoy safe havens anywhere in the world. The territory of no State should be permitted to be used in any manner that would encourage or sustain terrorist activity in another. Fund-raising activity on foreign soil in particular, either directly or indirectly through so-called charitable funds, must be prohibited. Should terrorism be permitted through international apathy to fester, it would poison the international body politic, enervating democratic processes, processes the international community is obliged to sustain.

It would be myopic for a nation to stand aloof or to disown responsibility for combating acts of terrorism which may seem too distant to evoke anything more than curiosity. With the English poet John Donne, I would say, "never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." Terrorists have the means to move freely across borders, have used chemical weapons and could well have access to nuclear weapons.

Global interdependence is undoubtedly a modern reality. However, opinions vary on the real implications of that phenomenon on the economies of developing countries. In the development debate, globalization and the call for integration into a single global economic grid are held out as the primary or even the sole option for developing countries seeking cooperation with developed countries.

But cooperation must not be confused with conformity. The specific character of individual developing countries, including the social and political compulsions facing their Governments, needs to be taken into account. Globalization involves the free flow of

capital, the liberalization of trade, the privatization of State enterprises, the freeing of price controls and the scaling down of welfare measures even for the most vulnerable sectors of the population. These have not always proved to be a panacea for those developing countries which have accepted them as economic injunctions.

It is important that such institutions as the World Trade Organization, the successor institution to GATT, be sensitive to the concerns of developing countries in such matters as external investment flows, which should not be clogged with linkages to issues more relevant to other organizations and institutions. Similarly, while sound social and environmental policies are essential for all societies, arbitrarily imposed standards should not be used as excuses for trade discrimination or concealed protectionism. The Government of Sri Lanka has provided opportunities for its private sector to advance as the principal engine of growth. Sri Lanka continues to welcome investment — economic and technological collaboration with foreign entrepreneurs on the basis of mutual benefit. These efforts, however, would be negated if such economic cooperation were pursued only on terms overwhelmingly favourable to one side.

Despite the pressures and tensions caused by a situation of conflict, we have succeeded in keeping our old democratic institutions and traditions alive and strong. We give our best attention to the protection and promotion of human rights. In furthering an elected Government's accountability to its own people, the Government of Sri Lanka has taken several measures to strengthen the legal framework and ensure the effective implementation of human-rights standards. One of the significant measures we took this year was the establishment by act of Parliament of a Human Rights Commission. We have ensured that the act guarantees independence of action for the Commission. The areas of competence of the Commission include monitoring, investigative and advisory functions. The act also addresses the question of liability of non-State actors for human-rights violations.

My Government has decided to accede to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as a logical next step in a series of national measures. Sri Lanka will thus be among the few countries that have taken the progressive decision to ratify the Optional Protocol. The Government has given the highest priority to Sri Lanka's obligations under international covenants and we are committed to continuing our cooperation with United Nations human-rights mechanisms.

Looking at the world, we see that, in Bosnia, following the Dayton Agreement, the guns have been finally silenced, and we are happy to note that the peace Agreement is holding up. Sri Lanka has condemned the atrocities committed in Bosnia, particularly the inhuman and cruel treatment of the Muslims. We believe that a settlement will not be complete unless those responsible for the atrocities are brought to justice.

In the Middle East, we hope the peace process will move on, without losing the momentum it had gained, despite the changes in the political scene in that area. Sri Lanka reiterates its support for the peace process, the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of conditions of peace and stability for all States in the region to live within secure boundaries. We commend the efforts taken by the United States of America, other concerned States and the States of the region to achieve the objective of bringing peace to the Middle East.

We share the concerns of the world community in regard to the crises that have overtaken Liberia and Burundi and express our fervent hope that peace will be restored to these troubled regions.

In our own region, South Asia, we have recorded progress in our efforts at regional cooperation. We celebrated the tenth anniversary of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) last December, heralded by the coming into force of the South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement. SAARC has set itself the goal of achieving a South Asian free-trade area by the early years of the new century. The private sectors of our region are engaged in close cooperation. We remain deeply committed to our abiding concern of alleviating, if not eradicating, poverty in our countries within a realistic time-frame.

Sri Lanka has turned increasingly towards promoting economic cooperation with countries in the Asia-Pacific region with which we identify closely. We see regional cooperation as a source of political stability as well as mutual economic benefit. We have recently become a partner in the Indian Ocean rim initiative. We have applied for membership of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council. We also expect that, when the required ratifications are completed, the Indian Ocean Marine Affairs Cooperation will provide a further impetus to technical and other cooperation among Indian Ocean countries. At the political level, Sri Lanka, with other members of the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee

on the Indian Ocean, is reviewing the concept of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace in the light of current realities in the region.

I wish to refer at this point to the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Sri Lanka is a founding member. Today — 26 September — is a particularly significant date for Sri Lanka, which commemorates a great patriot, the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who was assassinated on this date. He was Prime Minister from 1956 to 1959. He ushered in a uniquely peaceful, non-violent transformation of Sri Lankan society. His electoral victory in 1956 led to the empowerment of the rural, the underprivileged, the mass of the people of the country, and set the country's foreign policy firmly towards non-alignment.

Two days ago, we celebrated the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding, in a formal sense, of the Non-Aligned Movement. Mr. Bandaranaike did not live to see the Non-Aligned Movement firmly established in 1961. However, in 1956, 40 years ago, he addressed this General Assembly and said:

> "We are supposed to be the 'uncommitted' nations. I strongly object to that word. We are committed up to the hilt. We are committed to preserve decency in dealings between nations, we are committed to the cause of justice and freedom....
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> "No doubt the prevention of war is a necessary factor for peace, but peace, believe me, is something much more positive than that, for peace in its true sense means human understanding, human friendship and cooperation out of which, indeed, peace in its true form alone can arise. I look upon the United Nations as the one machine available to mankind today through which it can express this unconquerable spirit of man in its efforts to achieve that peace, friendship and collaboration." (*Official Records of the General Assembly, Eleventh Session, Plenary Meetings, 590th meeting, p. 234-35*)

The policies he initiated in respect of Sri Lanka — and I confine my remarks to foreign policy — were carried forward by his successor, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who, as Prime Minister, attended the first Non-Aligned summit in Belgrade in 1961 and subsequently presided over the fifth summit of the Movement in Colombo.

The Movement, which has a membership of 113 countries, is today the largest grouping of independent sovereign States in the world, apart from the United Nations itself, which have come together with the common objective of achieving peace, prosperity and the welfare of their people, a majority of whom belong to the third world. With the end of the cold war, there were sceptics who thought that the Movement would die in the absence of a clear role for the future. We have been able to dispel this misapprehension and chart a new course for the Movement. It has emerged today as the voice of the third world, of the smaller countries which are crying out for a place in the sun and demanding opportunities for economic development and self-expression.

Although the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has been extended indefinitely, it is to be remembered that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the ultimate end of the non-proliferation process. As a member of the Conference on Disarmament, our delegation has worked hard to ensure that all nuclear testing be banned as an interim measure, leading eventually to the total elimination of all nuclear weapons. The text of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty adopted by the General Assembly a few days ago was the result of several years' patient negotiations, yet its terms do not contain a firm and clear commitment to nuclear disarmament and the total elimination of all nuclear weapons. We would have expected the scope of prohibition to be truly comprehensive and the provisions for entry into force not to be self-debilitating. We look forward to the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention as well as the Convention relating to bacteriological and toxin weapons.

Sri Lanka remains a loyal and dedicated Member of the United Nations committed to upholding the noble principles of the Charter. Our faith and trust in this great institution, fashioned half a century ago, despite all its weaknesses and failures discerned in the intervening years, remains steadfast. These blemishes are after all but a mirror-image of the infirmities and inadequacies of all human kind. So we have no need to be either discouraged or despondent. We stand firm in the belief that the United Nations is still the best hope for this world. Indeed, we have no alternative or option in this matter, for to give up hope is only to slide into the depths of despair.

But our hopes for the United Nations must be grounded in action, in a firm resolve to act decisively in the best interests of this great institution, indeed of all humanity, untainted by the narrow national interests which have dogged our path in the course of these past five decades. This is no easy task, but unless we remain

unyielding in our determination to ensure that the United Nations remains faithful to the tasks envisioned by its founders, we will have failed the generations that follow us in the twenty-first century.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, His Excellency Mr. José Miguel Insulza.

Mr. Insulza (Chile) (*interpretation from Spanish*): First of all, Sir, I wish to express our pleasure at seeing the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Honduras — a country with which we have long-standing and well-established ties of friendship and with which we are currently working in the Security Council — preside over this meeting. I would also like through you to convey my Government's congratulations to Ambassador Razali Ismail on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

This is a transitional period for the United Nations and is therefore not devoid of complexities and uncertainty. Yet we still have confidence in the ability of Member States and in the privileged forum provided by this Organization to develop new policies and management structures to deal with the gamut of emerging international problems.

As this session of the General Assembly begins, we once again renew our commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter, the living instrument essential to the future work of this Organization. The United Nations is an Organization which, through its nature, principles and objectives, transcends any individual or national interests to represent, instead, the interests of all.

Not even those who criticize the United Nations in the hopes that they can weaken it or shrink its role have ever been able to propose any better way for us to come together to address the major problems of an increasingly interdependent world. That is why we are convinced that, far from becoming weaker, this Organization will be called upon to play an increasingly important role in this new era of globalization, in which cooperation is the only possible option for a true international order.

International peace and security, free trade, social development based on growth with equity, environmental protection, democracy and human rights are the basic components of the future work of our multilateral system. These are the areas of action of our Organization to which Chile attaches the highest priority and in which we will try, within our means to make our greatest contribution.

It has often been said that the end of the super-Power confrontation that characterized the first 50 years of the life of this Organization makes it easier than ever to shape the conditions for peace and stability. And yet, the challenges of bipolar confrontation have been replaced by new ones posed by the emergence of numerous local conflicts. These are often characterized by mass violations of human rights, uncontrolled population flows and humanitarian emergencies that threaten the security of individuals and States and eventually may affect the international system as a whole.

Our participation in the work of the Security Council is aimed at contributing our fair share to the maintenance of international peace and security. We encourage preventive diplomacy, consensus solutions, the implementation of measures to contain conflicts, the promotion of peaceful solutions through peace-keeping operations, conciliation, good offices and, in particular, the protection of affected populations and victims.

At the same time, it is indisputable that peace and security are not simply the absence of tensions and conflict between States. Harmony between people within the same border has now become a fundamental factor in international peace and security. Chile has suggested that the Security Council should act in cases where there is a real or potential risk of mass and systematic violations to which the international community has reacted strongly and when earlier mechanisms or bodies trying to resolve the problem have been exhausted.

Recent measures adopted by the Council, such as resolution 688 (1991) on protecting the Kurdish minority, 770 (1992) on providing assistance to victims of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, resolution 986 (1995) on alleviating the burden of sanctions on the civilian Iraqi population, are a few examples of a broader and more progressive interpretation of what constitutes a threat to peace and establish valuable precedents for helping the Security Council to deal with these kinds of conflict.

These criteria also guided us in our active participation on the question of Burundi, which led to the adoption of resolution 1072 (1996) establishing procedures for the various parties to the conflict to be able to agree on a political path to a peaceful resolution of their differences. We must continue to pay close attention to developments in this situation. The

international community, the United Nations and the Security Council cannot risk another tragedy like that of Rwanda and must exhaust all possible means of averting such a tragedy.

Today we would also like to express our great concern at the serious crisis that has arisen in the last few hours affecting the peace process in the Middle East, a process we have supported from the outset. We urge the parties to the conflict not to waste what has been built up in the last few years and to resume dialogue within the context of respect for agreements reached and for the beliefs of the peoples involved.

Establishing stability requires clear commitment to disarmament and arms control and limitation. My country has played an active role in this area, as shown in the recent ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention, membership in the Conference on Disarmament, which Chile had long aspired to, ratification of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and our unstinting support for nuclear-weapon-free zones.

Last Tuesday, 24 September 1996, I had the honour to sign on behalf of my country the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Just one year ago, this Assembly was discussing the nuclear-weapon tests still being conducted in the South Pacific and Asia. Today we are meeting to sign a Treaty that eliminates those tests once and for all and is the combined effort of almost all the countries in this Assembly, including all the present nuclear-weapon States. When the United Nations is criticized for its alleged inefficiency I think we should also vaunt our successes.

These initiatives, along with progress in the area of conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, help to create the right conditions for peace and security and enable the international community to concentrate its efforts and material resources on the development of nations and environmental protection.

Peacekeeping operations are one of the most important instruments of this system. Peacekeeping forces have to strive for results in the framework of clear and well-defined and legitimate mandates. Chile has participated in peacekeeping operations in India, Pakistan, the Middle East, Cambodia and Kuwait, and we are currently taking part in the activities of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) in Iraq.

However, there is no doubt that this mechanism needs to be tailored to dealing with current political circumstances. To this end, Chile is active in deliberations on how to improve planning and rapid-reaction capacity to deal with incipient conflicts. In all these aspects, a multilateral approach, action that enjoys the consent of the parties and financing through the Organization all help to ensure success in our work. We hope to increase significantly our contribution to operations such as the ones I have just described.

A broad understanding of the maintenance of international peace and security requires decisive action in the area of social development, democracy and the promotion of human rights. The world order of the next century will need broader basic freedoms. The global society of the next century is appearing as an open, heterogenous one, rich in material potential and new developments. What is needed now is to create conditions to enable people and States to make the most of this new setting, with increased access to the goods that are the fruit of rapid technological development.

In this respect, the six recent world conferences and summits on the environment and development, human rights, population and development, women, social development and, most recently, human settlements, have all been geared towards promoting protection of the individual and gradually creating a framework for social rights.

One tangible result of these meetings, in the social area, was the emergence of national coordinating bodies to implement the agreements signed. But these efforts are not enough, given the tragic reality of most of the less developed peoples, which means that the United Nations system must play an ever stronger role in the international social area. We must speed up the process of implementation within the context of the United Nations and of the agreements that emerged from Rio de Janeiro, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing and Istanbul.

The first steps have now been taken within the various bodies of the system, particularly in the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions. It is encouraging that the Economic and Social Council bodies dealing with sustainable development, women, social development and population have adopted multi-year agendas as a follow-up to the conferences.

Similarly, the agreements reached at the World Summit for Social Development include the decision to hold a special session of this Assembly in the year 2000 to assess the implementation of the agreements.

In this connection, Chile wishes to propose the establishment of a working group of this Assembly that, with that special session as its basis, can provide follow-up to the six conferences, taking into account the Agenda for Development, so that in the year 2000 the General Assembly can take up a very wide-ranging and coordinated assessment of the implementation of the commitments of the 1990s and make the necessary recommendations for future work.

In recent years Latin America has taken major steps forward with regard to free trade. This Assembly has already heard about progress in the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), Chile's recent accession to that agreement and MERCOSUR's decision to negotiate similar agreements with the Andean Group and Mexico. Taken alongside the progress made by other subregional groups, such as the Central America Common Market (CACM) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), these achievements all go to show the new impetus in Latin America for integration based on economic ideas that differ from those of the past but that remain true to the political will for unity that has always existed among our peoples.

However, none of these regional developments in which Chile has been very active constitutes an alternative to multilateralism. Chile continues to believe that a multilateral system to establish standards and practices to ensure free trade throughout the world, with clear institutional machinery for negotiations and dispute settlement, is the best option for the global economy and for each of our countries.

For this reason we have always insisted that our negotiations fit into the multilateral framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Latin America wants to be integrated so that it can become more of a part of the global economy, not cut off from it. Our bilateral and regional agreements are based on open regionalism. The best proof that this is being put into practice is that during this period of increased integration, external tariffs in the countries of our region have also fallen considerably, compared with those of the rest of the world.

One of the most promising developments of recent years has been the strengthening of the multilateral trade system through the establishment of the WTO. The existence of a standing multilateral forum means that more energy can be devoted to implementing the agreements reached and provides an institutional framework for continuous progress in negotiations and for opening up world trade.

In this connection, Chile attaches great importance to the follow-up meeting to the Uruguay Round, to be held in Singapore in December 1996. This, the first biannual meeting in the framework of the WTO, will be crucial in determining how effective the new mechanism is.

In the last few years many regions and countries in the world have made major progress towards broadening and consolidating democracy and respect for human rights. Latin America in particular has been experiencing a rapid movement towards democracy that is unprecedented in its history. This is accompanied by a considerable increase in political dialogue and regional coordination, evident mainly in the Rio Group, which has been active and fruitful for 10 years now.

Far from making us complacent, this emphasizes our concern that in many parts of the world there are still situations of massive violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Sometimes these situations relate to the peace and security problems we mentioned earlier.

As democracies develop, the support given them by the people depends more and more on their ability to ensure stable, efficient and transparent governments. The legitimacy of democratic governments is closely related to their accountability, but in many countries there is still corruption, inefficiency and insensitivity to social needs. This erodes the legitimacy of democracy and highlights its fragility.

The Government of our President, Eduardo Frei, has made democratic governance the main subject of the sixth summit of Ibero-American Heads of State and Government, to be held in Chile in November 1996. To this end, we have enjoyed the valuable cooperation of the United Nations, through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). We hope that our Organization's work in this area will spread to other regions in coming years.

One of the most dramatic changes for mankind in the last few decades has been our awareness that nature is fragile in the hands of man. There is a vulnerability in

nature we had not suspected until we saw the damage done, much of it irreparable. And so there is a new dimension to human responsibility to nature. The possibility of altering life or our planet for the worse means that our unbounded scientific and technological power must be accompanied by a new principle: and that is the idea of shared responsibility.

The work facing us is hard, but the path was already laid out in 1992 at the Conference on Environment and Development. In Rio de Janeiro there was agreement on fundamental aspects. On the basis of the consensus, and the commitments reached there, my country is prepared to proceed. Since that Earth Summit, Chile has further developed its environmental legislation. We have embraced the principles of the Rio Declaration that we consider fundamental, such as preventing environmental pollution, cooperation and the primary responsibility of the polluter. The State has accepted its obligation to adopt the most suitable instruments for preventive environmental management. But we also believe that society must be given a leading role in protecting the environment, and to this end various social actors must be more committed and more responsible.

My Government thinks it is also important to stress the political commitment of the world community to this issue that is by nature international and in many respects global. Hence, we attach great importance to the functioning of the bodies set up and to the monitoring of the agreements reached at the Earth Summit.

Developments in the international arena, the increasing diversity of issues to be taken up and the number of actors involved in the United Nations — all of this revitalizing the reform process of our Organization essential in order to adapt it to emerging realities and challenges. Integrated and multidisciplinary focus must be given preference in dealing with these problems. This constitutes the conceptual framework of the Organization and a basis for the urgently needed process of reform. This requires a very thorough analysis of the content of our multilateral work, of the Organization's agenda, of the functioning of intergovernmental bodies, of our human and financial resources and of the structure of the Secretariat. By doing all that, we can carry out reforms that are more than rhetoric, that will enable us to take up the challenges of the next century with policies and organizations adapted to the new reality.

Chile wishes to reiterate its appreciation for the work being done by the Secretary-General in this area. In difficult budgetary circumstances and facing a very difficult political situation, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali has decisively begun, within his purview, the process of reforming the Organization.

We welcome all initiatives that can enhance the efficiency of our Organization, reduce its bureaucratic excesses or alleviate its financial problems. But we believe that United Nations reform should not be mistakenly identified with one single issue of administration or budgetary efficiency. There is quite a contradiction between saying that we need an Organization adapted to the new challenges and focused on the next century, and then reducing the practical debate simply to cost-cutting and better control of resources. We have to enhance administrative efficiency, but we must also appreciate substantive effectiveness. Our objective should be to strengthen the Organization as well as to streamline it.

Before concluding, I cannot fail to mention a question of reform on this year's agenda that is more urgent than it was in previous years. The plethora of decisions taken by the Security Council has resulted in a growing desire on the part of the other Members of the United Nations to be more involved in Council decisions, so as to strengthen its legitimacy and the political support for its actions.

Improving the working methods of the Security Council has opened up additional ways of enhancing its credibility. There has been progress, but much remains to be done, particularly in connection with consultations with countries that contribute troops to peacekeeping operations, consultations with countries neighbouring a conflict area that might be affected, and third States that are negatively affected by the application of sanctions.

A second determining factor of legitimacy and political support for Council decisions relates to its membership. In this connection, Chile believes it essential to resolve once and for all the problems of increasing the membership of the Security Council, which have concerned the Assembly since 1992. We think there is a broad base of agreement for allowing Germany and Japan to become permanent members of the Council, and at the same time for giving developing countries one permanent seat per region, the occupants of which would be elected at the regional level.

Also, in order to meet the need for representativity, given the great increase in membership of the United

Nations in the last decade, the number of non-permanent seats should be increased from 10 to 15, with appropriate equitable geographical distribution. A membership of twenty-five members would not undermine the effectiveness of the Security Council but would enhance the representativity of its actions.

However, we wish to emphasize that Chile is willing to act with maximum flexibility here. This means we are willing to consider other proposals by other Member States that also seek to combine the two fundamental elements that should guide our decision: recognition of the new international realities and a legitimate desire for representativity in the principal bodies of our system.

We wished to touch upon those issues that, in Chile's view, will be the Organization's main tasks in the years to come, with a view to establishing the framework of stability and legitimacy necessary to achieve United Nations objectives. Chile commits its firm support to this difficult understanding, which will be attainable with the will and participation of all members of the international community.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Culture, Youth and Sport of the Principality of Liechtenstein, Her Excellency Ms. Andrea Willi.

Ms. Willi (Liechtenstein): At the outset I should like to congratulate Ambassador Razali Ismail on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. The Liechtenstein delegation is confident that his leadership will strengthen the United Nations ability to pursue the purposes and principles of the Charter.

One year after the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, it is appropriate to take stock once again of the achievements and shortcomings of our Organization and, first and foremost, to define the measures we have to take in order to face the challenges that lie ahead of us. One of the recurrent topics at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly was the call for a comprehensive and effective reform with a view both to enhancing the efficiency of the United Nations and to reducing the costs of its work.

I wish to express my appreciation for all the efforts that have been made by the Secretariat to meet this need, particularly to the Department of Administration and Management and to the Office of Internal Oversight Services, which have made an important contribution in this regard. However, it remains a fact that more needs to be done in order to cope with the financial crisis the Organization continues to struggle with. Even though there seems to be a consensus concerning the need for further such action, we were not able, during the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, to reach agreement on the measures that are so urgently needed. In our view, it is of the utmost importance that the high-level working group on the financial situation established by the General Assembly should adopt, during the fifty-first session, proposals for a solution of the financial crisis, including the payment of arrears. I should like to take this opportunity to express the support of the Government of Liechtenstein for the proposals that have been put forward by the European Union in this respect.

We support ongoing efforts with a view to a reform and enlargement of the Security Council. We are of the view that the reform of the Security Council should be consistent with the principle of the sovereign equality of all States, as enshrined in the Charter. Liechtenstein agrees with those Member countries that have said that with regard to the distribution of new permanent seats, the financial and other contributions to achieving the purposes of the Organization as well as a balanced geographic distribution should be adequately taken into account.

The President took the Chair.

Another area of crucial importance for the future work and credibility of our Organization is peacekeeping activities, which attract the particular interest and concern of the world community. The experience of the recent past has made it very clear that the United Nations needs to be better equipped in order to respond effectively and quickly to prevent situations that threaten international peace and security. If we are to enhance the credibility of the United Nations as a whole and the effectiveness of United Nations peace-keeping operations, we have to ensure that every such mission is given a clear mandate and vested with the funds necessary for its full implementation. Very useful proposals to that end have been made by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "An Agenda for Peace". We have noted with satisfaction the progress made by the Working Group established by the General Assembly to discuss the Agenda for Peace, and the provisional agreements reached by two of the four subgroups dealing with specific aspects of the Agenda for Peace. I wish to express my hope that the two other subgroups, which have to discuss the very important questions of preventive diplomacy and

peacemaking, and post-conflict peace-building, respectively, will also be able to conclude their work soon, so a comprehensive agreement on the Agenda for Peace can be adopted.

Some of the events that have taken place over the past few years have made it very clear that more attention should be given to preventive diplomacy, which can avert human suffering and reduce costs considerably. One of the situations where determined preventive action is urgently needed is the one that has arisen in Burundi, where patterns of large-scale violations of human rights and the risk of a further worsening of the situation continue to exist. It is indeed disturbing to note that the international community has not been able to take all possible measures to prevent a further deterioration of this situation.

Liechtenstein made its own contribution to the furthering of conflict prevention by introducing an initiative on the right of self-determination before the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session. It has been stated many times that the vast majority of armed or other violent conflicts today are no longer conflicts between but within States. Such conflicts often have their roots in tensions between communities living within States, and the thrust of the initiative of Liechtenstein is aimed at finding peaceful solutions to such situations before one of the parties involved resorts to violence. It seems to us that the right of self-determination, the exercise of which has played a crucial role in the history of the United Nations, progressively needs to be seen outside its traditional context and should be further developed and adapted to the conditions that prevail in today's world.

Many cases of intra-State conflicts have made clear that it is timely and necessary for the international community to develop mechanisms that will enable communities living within States to exercise the right of self-determination in flexible ways and in accordance with existing international law. The Liechtenstein research programme that was established at Princeton University as part of the contribution of Liechtenstein to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations is intended to provide further know-how for, and assistance in, developing such mechanisms, and I should like to take this opportunity to thank all those countries that continue to support us in this endeavour.

As a small State, Liechtenstein attaches the utmost importance to strengthening international law and to effective disarmament. We therefore actively supported the draft resolution, submitted by Australia on behalf of a large number of countries, that enabled us to adopt the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) after lengthy and very difficult negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament. The CTBT will take us one step further towards achieving our goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. The Government of Liechtenstein is of the view that it is a crucial step. Tomorrow, therefore, I will sign the CTBT on behalf of Liechtenstein, and I would like to express our hope that as many countries as possible will do the same.

One year ago we met in Beijing and unanimously adopted a Declaration and a Platform for Action that represent a new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all women in the world. In Liechtenstein we are in the process of preparing the implementation of the Platform for Action, which includes, *inter alia*: motivation for women to enter politics and to present their candidatures; specific academic and vocational guidance for girls; measures to facilitate the compatibility of professional and family life; and sensitization towards the problem of violence against women and children.

Peace is a prerequisite for the attainment of equality between women and men. Unfortunately, aggression and armed and other types of conflict persist in many parts of the world. Women rarely have any role in the decisions leading to armed conflicts, but they contribute to a large extent to preserving social order in times of war and armed conflicts. We believe that women could and should play an increased role in conflict resolution, and we would particularly welcome more women being appointed as Special Representatives of the Secretary-General.

There has been a dramatic growth in the need for humanitarian assistance in recent years. The United Nations system, playing a major role in the field of humanitarian relief, has been tested almost to breaking point by recent crises. Complex emergency situations have resulted in increased demands on scarce resources. There has been criticism that as a result of concentration on emergency relief, little effort was made to devise recovery programmes. The humanitarian community will have to play an important role in ensuring the transition from relief to rehabilitation. We should not forget, however, that it has been only four years since humanitarian action provided by the United Nations system was given structure and coherence.

Anti-personnel land-mines, with their immensely destructive effects on individuals and communities around

the world, are a humanitarian tragedy. Innocent civilians, in particular women, children, refugees and displaced persons, are at greatest risk. Furthermore, mines impede the rehabilitation and reconstruction of societies torn by war. In keeping with its mandate to develop and promote international humanitarian law, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has continuously called attention to weapons whose effects threaten to undermine that law, and we commend the ICRC for its efforts in that respect. I wish to reiterate our call for a total ban on these deadly weapons.

We hope that, during this fifty-first session of the General Assembly, we will be able to strengthen the United Nations, which has been indispensable to the international community for more than 50 years, and to enhance its credibility in the eyes of the peoples whom our Organization represents.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore, His Excellency Mr. S. Jayakumar.

Mr. Jayakumar (Singapore): Last year we met in a celebratory mood. But after every party comes the sober dawn, and we now face the sombre reality that the United Nations risks marginalization. Its role in the twenty-first century is not to be taken for granted.

The sad truth is that today the United Nations plays little or no practical role in the management of the most important political, strategic and economic questions of our time. But this was not always the case as we recall: the United Nations played a significant role in easing the pangs of decolonization. Even at the height of the cold war, the United Nations was not an unimportant instrument through which the super-Powers could manage regional proxy conflicts and, on occasion, even direct nuclear confrontation.

This contrast with its past should lead us to regard the present and future of the United Nations with deep concern. We can no longer postpone a critical examination of fundamental issues. It is for this reason that my delegation is especially gratified to see Malaysia occupy the presidency of the General Assembly at this important turning point for the future of the United Nations. We in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) know Tan Sri Razali Ismail for his commitment and clear thinking.

I can do no better than echo what you, Mr. President, said about reform in the first plenary meeting of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session; we entirely agree with you. The interminable debates about the need for United Nations reform have led to precious little real reform. These debates have served to conceal and not to clarify basic issues. An important theme has been the need for greater efficiency; we all support that. No one can seriously argue against more productivity, better management and less waste. The key question, however, is: efficient to do what?

What kind of United Nations do we really want and for what purposes? We all know that the purposes of the United Nations are enshrined in the very first Article of the Charter. Nevertheless, the answers are not self-evident. We all know that the first of the United Nations purposes is

"To maintain international peace and security".

But what does this mean? The more extravagant post-cold war hopes for a new Agenda for Peace have proved illusory. The failure of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) raises troubling questions about the role of the United Nations after the cold war. The essential lesson to be drawn from UNPROFOR's fate is not merely how the Security Council became a political theatre to assuage the domestic concerns of some of its principal members; nor is it only the truism that the United Nations could do no more than what its principal members allowed it to do. The real tragedy for the United Nations in Bosnia is that when the major Powers finally decided to get serious about what they determined to be a threat to international peace and security, their preferred instrument was clearly not the United Nations.

Again, we all agree that poverty breeds conflict, and that the gap between the rich and poor is widening. Yet the Agenda for Development has been mired in theological arguments about the definition of sustainable development. Now I do not mean to suggest that clarity of objectives is unimportant. But the real issues are not that complicated, because what the least developed most urgently need is not intellectual sophistry but help: help to build the institutions and formulate the policies that will allow them to plug into the global economy. The United Nations has not adequately met these challenges.

The stalemate in reform is not merely because of the difficulty of the questions or because of conflicting interests. Of course, the issues are thorny and differences in interests inevitable in any system of sovereign States. That is precisely why we need the United Nations, as the

Charter envisages, "to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations".

Why then is the United Nations today less able to perform this vital function? In my view, it is because it has been reluctant to adequately confront the implications of the two most significant developments of our time. First, the end of the cold war and, secondly, the emergence of a truly global world economy. The conjunction of these two events is changing the manner in which States relate to each other in unprecedented and fundamental ways. Yet these developments are at best only imperfectly reflected in the United Nations. And any international organization that divorces itself from international realities has no future.

The most obvious consequence for the United Nations since the end of the cold war has been the great increase in membership. But the change in the nature of Members has occasioned less comment. In 1945, small States, which I define as those having a population of 10 million or less, formed 59 per cent of a United Nations with 51 Members. Half a century later, in 1995, small States by the same definition formed the same percentage of a United Nations of 185 Members. And 23 of the 26 countries — more than 88 per cent — that joined the United Nations after 1989 were also small States. I expect that when the United Nations membership expands further, as it surely must, the majority of new Members will also be small States.

This is because changes in the structure of the international economy engendered by technological advances and the end of the cold war have made size less important in the determination of a country's viability. What matters most today is not merely the extent of a State's frontiers or the wealth of its resources; the key is the ability of a State to integrate itself as part of a network, and size is irrelevant to this.

The most important international networks are not composed of relations between States. The critical networks are increasingly defined by transnational patterns of relationships between cities, regions and subregions that may only imperfectly fit in with the formal political boundaries of individual States. This again makes a country's size or its resources less important than its ability to access these networks.

It is a fact that many small countries are also among the less developed. This is not surprising given the skewed distribution of international wealth. But the significant point is that to be small is no longer an automatic or fatal disability. It can even be advantageous. This has emboldened many to seek self-determination. And since the same trends have loosened the ability of capitals to control their peripheries, many have succeeded.

Where economics leads, politics inevitably follows. Paradoxically, the political consequence of increasing economic integration of a globalized world economy is a certain loosening of political bonds. We see the effects of this most dramatically in the physical breakup of large and diverse States. But these are exceptional situations. Even when, as is more usual, the formal political boundaries remain intact, the ability of capitals of large and relatively homogeneous States to impose a single direction over all their constituent parts is clearly diminishing. Power is devolving everywhere. This trend is a new international reality.

I do not wish to overstate the argument. So long as sovereignty remains the chief organizing principle of the international system, the exercise of force cannot be discounted in inter-State relations. In war, size is not entirely irrelevant, even though technology has made it something less than the totally decisive factor it was in the past. But war is an extreme condition of international relations. Under normal conditions, the very notions of power and wealth are being redefined and becoming more diffuse, their different dimensions less prone to be focused in just a few world capitals. Hierarchy is still a fact of international life. But what does it really mean to be a "great Power" at the end of the twentieth century? The very phrase today sounds anachronistic.

Bereft of a simple strategic enemy, the post-cold-war foreign policy decision-making of the major Powers is increasingly localized, with domestic politics exercising greater impact. The policies of big Powers in a globalized world, where the economic and other interests of their component parts may be at odds with those of the capital, is becoming less coherent. The very notion of a single national interest is becoming somewhat ambiguous.

All this is making it increasingly difficult for even the biggest countries to routinely bring their power to bear in an interdependent world, where an attack on an opponent may well damage their own interests. Wielding power is becoming more unpredictable even for those who control its greatest instruments. It is not an accident that the big Powers are now somewhat more cautious about exercising power nakedly save in exceptional circumstances and against States that are marginal in the global economy.

I do not mean to suggest that the traditional notion of international relations structured by the interactions of a few big Powers pursuing their individual national interests is entirely obsolete. But it is surely an inadequate description of the world today. The balance of military power is still important. But the strict distinction between high politics and low politics on which the traditional balance of power rested is increasingly blurred.

Now, all this ought to make a consultative, multilateral process more attractive to everyone, and not less attractive. Alas, this is not so. Herein lies the root of the problems of the United Nations. All States, big and small, are adjusting to the changing international system. Indeed they have no choice. But not all are choosing to do so in or through the United Nations. In the United Nations, most of the Powers that we traditionally designate as "great" have reacted with varying degrees of disquiet to these new international realities.

Some, troubled by their decreasing ability to control events even within their own frontiers, are frustrated at their inability to impose their order on what is perceived as a recalcitrant, unfamiliar and intrusive Organization. Others see a threat to their position and prestige. Psychological adjustments are always the most difficult to make. It is thus not surprising that in the United Nations their reflex reaction has generally been a stubborn defence of the status quo.

In discussions on United Nations reform, this simple fact is all too often obscured by the use of arcane and convoluted jargon. I am encouraged, Mr. President, by your reputation for plain speaking, for pulling aside the veil of rhetoric and letting the truth be known. If the United Nations is to be marginalized, let the responsibility clearly be seen to lie where it should. This is most evident in the two most critical and inter-related areas: Security Council reform and finance.

Discussions on Security Council reform have emphasized the Council's size and composition, and in particular the possibility of the admission of new permanent members. There is a wide consensus that in the event that there should be agreement for an increase in the permanent membership, an increase only by industrialised countries would be unacceptable. Many countries agree that Japan and Germany should become new permanent members when consensus is reached on the expansion of the Security Council. Nevertheless, crucial ambiguities remain about whether new permanent members should have the veto. It is especially difficult to imagine major Powers allowing developing countries the veto over their policies. And therefore the stalemate continues.

There is also widespread agreement that Security Council reform should comprise a comprehensive package that would include changes in the working methods of the Security Council in the direction of greater transparency and participation by the membership of the Organization as a whole. But the permanent members have been reluctant to admit any but the most cosmetic of changes to the Security Council's working methods. Yet this is the most critical aspect of Security Council reform for the small States which form the majority of United Nations Members. Small countries do not aspire to permanent membership. But as the principal organ for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council's working methods and its decision-making processes are of vital and legitimate interest to them because they can have direct a impact on their security.

One of the most important and innovative proposals currently on the table is for a reinterpretation of Article 31 of the Charter. This would allow greater participation by non-members in informal Security Council consultations when questions affecting them are being considered. It was extremely discouraging that this modest proposal was categorically rejected by almost every permanent member. Indeed, most refused even to seriously discuss it. It must surely be a basic principle of elementary justice that parties most directly affected by a particular situation should be allowed to present their views directly to the body that will have the most influence over any action that the United Nations may take on that situation. That is in fact the precise reason why Article 31 was included in the Charter in the first place. The intention was clearly to reconcile great-Power leadership with the principle of sovereign equality.

Informal consultations are an innovation that has evolved over the years. All the most important decisions the Security Council takes today are made informally by permanent members. Even the participation of non-permanent members in the real decisions is sometimes more symbolic than significant. Formal meetings are clearly only a choreographed ritual to set the final seal of approval. A reinterpretation of Article 31 would not require an amendment to the Charter, nor would it mean that non-members must participate in all informal consultations. It is therefore no real threat to the authority of the permanent members; it is just an important reform that would undoubtedly enhance the legitimacy, and

hence the general acceptability and effectiveness, of Security Council decision-making by bringing the process more in tune with the temper of our times.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am not suggesting that the size and composition of the Security Council are unimportant. I understand the merit of the claims for new permanent membership that have been advanced by both industrialized and developing countries. Singapore supports the expansion of the Security Council by up to five new permanent members as part of a comprehensive package that would, among other things, include the consequent adjustment of non-permanent membership to maintain a balanced ratio. But given the profound changes in international relations that are under way, refusing to seriously discuss anything but membership, and even that with critical ambiguities, would be akin to trying to prepare the United Nations for the twenty-first century by applying a nineteenth-century model of great-Power politics to it.

The same resistance to seriously engaging the legitimate interests of the small-State majority of United Nations Members also underlies the financial problems of the United Nations. No one disagrees that the key reason for the cash flow problems of the United Nations is the failure of Member States to pay their dues in full and on time.

There are various reasons why various Member States have not met their legal obligations. Some are poor. But no one has ever suggested that the largest debtor lacks the capacity to pay. Its argument is that its assessed contributions must be reduced because the state of its domestic political consensus does not permit it to sustain its current share of the United Nations budget. The financial burdens, it is consequently argued, ought therefore be more widely spread. I do not lightly dismiss such arguments. They reflect the increasing difficulty of defining and exercising great power that I had earlier called one of the new international realities. I can therefore sympathize with such arguments. But it is not politically acceptable to pick and choose which of the new realities to emphasize when useful, and which to ignore when inconvenient.

Several permanent members have complained of the financial burdens they bear, and have sought to spread them more widely. But there has never been any suggestion by any of the big Powers that their control over critical United Nations expenditure decisions, in particular peacekeeping expenditures, should be proportionately diffused among the majority of small countries which would be expected to take up the financial slack that they want to discard. All the permanent members have been reluctant to allow anything more than the most superficial reexamination of their authority or their relationship with the membership as a whole. Discussions on the role of the General Assembly, which is the only universal and truly representative United Nations organ, have touched mainly on peripheral issues, such as the timing of plenary meetings, the duration of the general debate and the organization of the General Assembly's work.

No one should disagree that to put the United Nations on a sound financial basis ought to be a common endeavour. We certainly do not. But it must really be a collective enterprise involving fair give and take. Political resistance coalesces because it has become clear that the majority are expected to give, while the few only take. Resistance is underscored by the historical fact that the percentage financial contributions of all permanent members, except France, have been steadily reduced over the years while their privileges have not. Resistance is strengthened by the recollection that the United Nations has in fact repeatedly made the financial adjustments asked for, but as yet without any appreciable change in the payment record of the largest contributor.

I do not suggest that this situation is the result of a deliberate policy, since no country takes any pleasure in being unable to pay its dues for whatever reason. But it is politically incongruous and basically unfair to ask the majority to assume a greater share of the financial burdens without at the same time being prepared to allow them any more authority over the most important expenditure decisions. It is untenable to have an almost total separation between the authority for launching peacekeeping operations and how and who should pay for them. The United Nations is the only organization in which a small number of Members run up the largest bills while everybody else pays them.

The stubborn defence of the status quo is all the more striking because no one has asked for anything more than the most modest and incremental adjustments to the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council to allow the general membership a little greater participation in and shared responsibility for the decision-making with the greatest budgetary implications.

Singapore is, of course, a small State, and I do not claim to be a disinterested party. As a small State, we are passionately concerned about and vitally engaged in the future of the United Nations. However, our drawing

attention to the real obstacles to reform is not just in the interests of small countries alone.

I have suggested that the paradoxical political consequence of a globalized world economy is a certain enhancement of centrifugal tendencies everywhere. A universal international organization to play an integrative role is therefore needed by everyone, big and small, if this is not to lead to conflict. Only the United Nations can play this role, and if it did not exist, we would have had to invent it. But the United Nations can play this integrative role only if the legitimate aspirations of the small States are not ignored and if the majority do not become increasingly alienated from the very Organization that purports to represent them.

Some may dismiss the distance between the rhetoric and the reality of the big-Power attitude towards United Nations reform as simple hypocrisy. I do not accept such a simplistic explanation. I can empathize with the far more complex and wrenching psychological adjustments that the big Powers need to make. The big Powers must summon the political courage to begin this process and embrace the reality of, and necessity for, change. I appeal to them to work with us, the small-State majority, to make this truly a United Nations for all — all — its Members.

Prestige does not depend solely on privilege, and power shared is not power lost. The new international realities are making a zero-sum conception of State power obsolete. A credible United Nations, one that is not regarded as the mere tool of its largest Members, will be a more effective instrument for the foreign policies of all its Members, big and small.

In closing, let me say that my delegation looks forward to close collaboration with you, Sir, and all other members over the next year to advance a collective vision of a truly representative, effective and united United Nations for the twenty-first century.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, His Excellency Mr. H.A.F.M.O. van Mierlo.

Mr. van Mierlo (Netherlands): I join my colleague, Minister Dick Spring of Ireland, who spoke on behalf of the European Union, in congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly. As a representative with a long and distinguished career in United Nations affairs, you are especially qualified to guide our work in the coming year.

As the present century draws to a close, we need to ask ourselves what shape the United Nations is in. Is it ready to face the world that lies ahead? Is it ready to meet the needs of generations that are still to be born? The realities confronting us today may still be the realities of tomorrow, and they are formidable. We are witnessing increasing poverty, a growing rift between rich and poor, migration, population pressure, dwindling food stocks, hazards to public health and the environment, drugs, terrorism, internal conflicts and wholesale violations of human rights: a daunting litany.

In the face of these realities, to argue in favour of reform of this Organization would be stating the obvious. Of course we need reform. Clearly, the United Nations, over the years, has turned into an institutional jungle where outsiders do not venture, an organization which for that reason alone has lost much of its credibility and which is badly in need of revitalization. We have to reform. There is no alternative.

We need reforms to get back what we have lost; that is, not power, but authority. Power is wielded on many different levels, and by some States more than by others. There is not very much the United Nations can do to influence Member States to make use of their power, and the power of the United Nations itself is rather limited. But what the United Nations was given a lot of 51 years ago, was authority: moral authority as well as legal authority, the kind of authority that comes with speaking on behalf of the world community, with voicing the public conscience and transcending vested interests. Indeed, if this Organization is to approach the future from a position of strength and of confidence, and if we expect the nations of the world to rally behind the flag of the United Nations, its authority needs to be intact. In fact, it needs to be growing.

Well, is it growing? Here a sobering note is due. At this critical juncture in its history, the United Nations is seeing its authority, the one commodity it can never have too much of, compromised and weakened; this is also the one commodity it cannot afford to have too little of. I would wish to highlight some of the manifestations of how the authority of the United Nations is on the wane and offer some prospects for shoring it up again.

First, multilateralism, as such, is under pressure. Many States no longer regard multilateral cooperation as a separate goal of their foreign policy, but instead as one of many policy instruments which they can choose to apply or not to apply in accordance with their national

interests. Alterative sources of international leadership have sprung up, and ad hoc coalitions are formed as the need arises. The United Nations is regarded more and more as a vehicle for safeguarding a nation's particular interests, even in the short term, rather than as the preferred avenue for solving pressing world-wide problems. This shopping-mall attitude towards the United Nations is in stark contrast with the lofty principles the founding fathers signed their names to.

Gradual loss of authority is also caused by disappointment and frustration. The United Nations was once established as an ideal form of international cooperation. Particularly after the end of the cold war, expectations rose as never before. For decades, the world had been dominated and the United Nations paralysed by two power blocs at loggerheads. The United Nations could now finally begin to play the role originally laid out for it.

Unfortunately, this did not happen. Success stories such as the United Nations involvement in Namibia, in El Salvador and Mozambique were overshadowed by disappointment over the outcome of Missions Impossible such as Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia. That the Member States themselves had decided to send the United Nations on those missions could not stem the erosion of authority that came with them.

Frustration has mounted over effectiveness and efficiency, two qualities that have eluded the United Nations for a long time. It would be facile to blame the lack of them on the Secretariat alone. The grinding manner in which the intergovernmental machinery of this Organization works is a major factor as well.

Criticism abounds. The track record of the United Nations is in many ways impressive, to be sure, and even more so when we look at the broad spectrum of the entire United Nations system. Its achievements in the fields of international law, human rights, development, the population crisis, health care, the position of women, labour conditions and disarmament are just random examples. In reality, the list is long. Yet somehow United Nations-bashing has become the craze these days and even a tool of campaign rhetoric, or else it serves to distract attention from internal problems. Nevertheless, the United Nations moral authority is sapped by the real and the imagined and by criticism justified or unjustified.

Then there is the financial situation. From the early days, payment or non-payment of contributions has been indicative of the United Nations approval rating. The level of arrears we are now facing is, however, without precedent. Sadly, it is in large part a reflection of declining confidence and belief in the Organization's potential. The present financial turmoil is not primarily the cause of the United Nations predicament, but rather a consequence of it, a symptom. Of course, empty coffers will lead to less output eventually. Less output would undermine authority even further. Less authority in turn leads to fewer payments, which again would exacerbate the financial crisis. And so we may see the United Nations caught in a downward spiral. The current payment habits of some Member States amount to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Worse, they betray the very principles on which the United Nations was founded. The absence of full, prompt and unconditional payments will further erode the United Nations authority, the same authority those very States helped to bestow on the Organization 50 years ago.

If there is one policy area in which the United Nations has lost much of its authority and stands to loose even more, it is peace and security. Take Burundi. Today, the humanitarian and political situation there is alarming. We are witnessing a creeping genocide. Terror prevails. In the past few months alone, thousands of innocent men, women and children have lost their lives. An explosion of genocide is still a real threat. We cannot allow the occurrence of another disaster such as that which took place in Rwanda in 1994. In that year, we claimed that we could hardly have seen it coming. In the case of Burundi, there will be no such excuse. The writing is clearly on the wall. If we fail once again and a second genocide does take place, the United Nations will suffer its most dramatic loss of authority ever.

What can we do to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations and hence to help it regain the authority it needs in order to fulfil its mandate? How can we reverse the downward spiral?

If the United Nations is to be effective, the various instruments at the disposal of the international community have to be used in an integrated manner. This holds true particularly in the area of peace and security. In this area, political, military, socio-economic, electoral and humanitarian assistance, as well as reconstruction and development, will have to be applied in harmony. Hence, an integrated approach is the only way effectively to prevent and combat conflicts. The United Nations needs to be on the ground when it matters and where it matters. This is the lesson that can be drawn from recent crises in Africa — such as in Rwanda and Somalia — where the

international response to tragic violence became ineffective through lack of coherence.

Preventive diplomacy, on the one hand, and post-conflict peace-building, on the other, require increased attention. More than ever, the United Nations should focus on the prevention of conflicts and, when conflicts do occur nevertheless, on defusing them at an early stage.

When I addressed this Assembly two years ago, I drew attention to the United Nations capability, or rather the lack of it, to respond adequately and in a timely manner to acute situations of conflict. Some progress has been made since then — progress in the form of modest intermediate steps that would in the longer run lead to a United Nations better equipped to maintain peace and security. Today, there is a growing number of countries that take part in the United Nations standby-arrangements system and in the efforts of a group of nations to establish a United Nations high-readiness brigade under this system. The transparency of the Security Council's decision-making concerning peace-operations has improved. A rapidly deployable headquarters will soon be added to the United Nations peace-keeping capacity.

The future of conflict prevention is linked to the United Nations power to combat yet another threat to its authority: impunity. Does the world community actually have sufficient means to bring to justice those guilty of war crimes or crimes against humanity? As the cases of Burundi and Liberia sadly illustrate, the prospect of impunity provides an open invitation to commit crimes without fear of retribution and stands in the way of future reconciliation and reconstruction. The Tribunals on the former Yugoslavia and on Rwanda represent the single most important endeavour of the international community since Nuremberg to adjudicate war crimes and crimes against humanity. We cannot let it fail. Yet the Yugoslavia Tribunal will face a serious problem so long as it cannot gain custody of more of the many people it has indicted. Soon, the present circumstances will erode its authority and, indeed, that of the United Nations as a whole.

My country feels that the establishment of ad hoc Tribunals once again underlines the need for the speedy creation of a permanent international criminal court. Once this Court has been established, it will become even more imperative that those accused of such crimes actually be brought to trial. The United Nations should enhance its capacity to ensure the apprehension, extradition and trial of those so accused.

If there is one area of the United Nations where moral and legal authority play crucial roles, it is that of human rights. Here, the record of the Organization is impressive, but still more can and should be done and new challenges lie in store.

Mr. Wilmot (Ghana), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Increased attention for human rights will increase the moral authority of the United Nations. In this regard, its authority should rest firmly on the Universal Declaration, adopted by this Organization in 1948

> "as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" (*resolution 217 A (III), eighth preambular para.*) —

in other words, a universal framework. Forty-five years later, in Vienna, the universality of human rights was once again expounded by the United Nations membership as we know it today.

Yet, universality of human rights is under pressure. Ever since Vienna, the discussion of what is called cultural particularities seems to have chipped away at it. Some Governments claim that their nation's human-rights performance cannot be held up to the same standards as other nations' due to differences in their historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.

Let us make no mistake. There are differences in the way people look at human rights in the various regions of the world and the ongoing dialogue in the United Nations would be ill-served if we chose to deny that there were any differences at all. True, religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions should be borne in mind at all times and, by themselves, are even protected by the Universal Declaration. But their link to human rights as such and to the concept of universality is a very particular one. The international community has expressed it nowhere more accurately than in the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing one year ago. As we agreed in Beijing, rather than detracting from the ambit of universality, cultural differences should contribute to the full enjoyment of human rights. The States Members of this Organization agreed in Vienna that, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, it is their duty to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Increased emphasis calls for more financial resources. A larger part of the United Nations budget should be devoted to human rights. This, in turn, will enhance the moral authority of the Organization in the eyes of the multitudes who are still deprived of their human rights today. Letting the programme wither away will produce the opposite effect.

The General Assembly, being the only plenary organ of the United Nations, is the most conspicuous. Credibility and authority are very much tied to the Assembly's performance. Sadly, this body sees many of its resolutions ignored. We should vigorously seek to infuse new vitality into the Assembly's proceedings and in the relevance of its achievements.

Two weeks ago, the Assembly effectively lived up to its responsibility by adopting the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty by an overwhelming majority. The adoption of the Treaty by this world body lends authority to the new norm outlawing nuclear testing. My country feels privileged that it was called upon to preside over the negotiations. Adoption of the Treaty contributes to the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons, a goal to which my country remains fully committed. We aim for a propitious entry into force. But even in the absence of entry into force, the authority of the United Nations will make it more difficult for any State to act against the Treaty.

Increased attention should be given to those activities of the United Nations which are not of a strictly political nature or concerned with security, namely, the socio-economic aspects and the strengthening of those parts of the United Nations system dealing with such matters as poverty, population, food security, urbanization, equality of women and the environment. These areas are crucial for the future of the world and for the quality of life on this planet. These are also areas where the Organization is especially qualified to identify and debate the problems and where it has set up an impressive array of operational activities. A series of world conferences in recent years has helped to upgrade the authority of the United Nations system. They have set an agenda for the United Nations and the Member States to follow during the coming decades. The World Food Summit in November should do the same. The Summit faces the awesome problem of a world that may have to feed 10 billion people by the time the United Nations is 100 years old.

There is, of course, a risk that expectations have been raised too high once more and that disappointment will lead once more to loss of authority. The United Nations and its Member States have to make sure this does not happen. The United Nations will play a major role in the fields of advocacy, coordination and monitoring. Although the United Nations itself contributes to implementation through its field operations, the Member States bear the primary responsibility for full implementation at the national level. Together, they can succeed in ensuring that the world community reaches the goals it has set for itself.

The authority of the United Nations is at stake. It will not disappear in a clap of thunder. It will die with a whimper. It stands to fade away gradually, without at any time making alarm bells ring, and with it, the Organization may well slide into the margins of the world scene. The United Nations needs a new sense of direction and purpose to become, once again, a beacon for mankind as intended by the authors of the Charter. That requires a sustained effort of all Members of this Organization. There is little time left. Let us use it well.

The Acting President: I now call on the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, His Excellency Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Mr. Al-Sabah (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): On behalf of the State of Kuwait, it gives me great pleasure to extend to Mr. Razali our sincere congratulations on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

Given his personal experience and wisdom, we believe that he will be able to guide our discussions efficiently towards a successful conclusion. Since he represents a sister Muslim country, I am particularly pleased to take this opportunity to underscore the firm bonds of brotherhood in Islam between Malaysia and Kuwait.

I am pleased to use this occasion also, to pay tribute to the President of the previous session of the Assembly for his outstanding efforts and contributions during that historic session.

Kuwait views with pride and acknowledgement the impressive performance of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, especially his leading role in and commitment to the enhancement of the functioning of the world Organization in the areas of global peace, security and development. Mr. Boutros-

Ghali has consistently worked to restructure the United Nations to bring it more into line with the aspirations and expectations attached to it. I want to make special mention of the concrete steps the Secretary-General has taken to curb and rationalize expenditures, to streamline the administrative structure, and to reorganize the Secretariat in order to reflect current realities in the global arena. Hence, Kuwait subscribes to the position adopted by the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in supporting the Secretary-General's bid to remain on board in order to pursue his reform programme for the revitalization of the United Nations.

Last year, the family of nations observed the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations against a backdrop of universal recognition of the wonderful achievements of the United Nations system. The record includes, to cite only a few areas: assistance in the attainment of national independence by many States; the establishment of the principles contained in the Charter, including the right to self-determination; the consolidation of codes of civilized conduct among States; the upholding of justice and equality; and the promotion of economic and social development. Perhaps the most shining success of the United Nations is the peacekeeping operations it carries out in many volatile regions of the world. Such operations have recently assumed a new humanitarian dimension in the form of relief efforts in cases of natural disasters and civil war, and election monitoring.

We view the United Nations as a forum for debating the future of humankind among nations, with a view to promoting the well-being, dignity and basic freedoms of the human person. The ever-increasing complexity of contemporary life in this global village and the ever-changing set of common and pressing issues which continue to emerge require a concerted international effort through the United Nations. By the same token, we must admit that there are gargantuan challenges that continue to face the United Nations, most poignantly the ethnic and regional conflicts that endanger regional stability and the international security system. Other pressing issues include the population explosion, environmental degradation, the water shortage, desertification, the food deficit, the growing gap between the North and the South, the regional arms race, the threat posed by nuclear weapons, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, development concerns, barriers to economic and trade cooperation, the removal of restrictions on free trade and, last but not least, human rights.

To rally all States members of the world community round ways to deal with the fundamental transformations that face the world, we must: believe in the energy, potential and mechanisms of the United nations system to be able to address global concerns in a multilateral fashion; provide enthusiastic financial, political and moral support for the United Nations and identify with its principles and purposes; fully pay assessed contributions to the United Nations budget; and actively pursue a genuinely peaceful policy that recognizes and respects the rights and legitimate concerns of other Member States, with a view to building up a regional order in line with the norms of international behaviour. Accordingly, regional arrangements should be anchored in the established codes of justice and rules of international law and treaties. Here we must ensure respect for human rights, and protect human dignity and the freedom of choice. In this context, human development without discrimination is essential for the overall economic and social development of society. Top priority should be given to this goal rather than to squandering national resources on weaponry. We must face up to terrorism and muster the national will to work collectively on a global level to stamp out the root causes of this plague which afflicts both the weak and the strong, the poor and the rich, for, in the final analysis, terrorism is not susceptible to reason; it stems from bigotry, traumatizes the innocent, resorts to violence and seeks no dialogue.

Against this backdrop, the indisputable fact remains that today's world is interdependent in its security as well as in its general concerns. The affluent few may not be able to live in exclusive comfort while a majority of humankind is marginalized in deprivation and poverty. Here emerges the stark need for a collective conceptual and material effort to develop a common agenda for the benefit of all human beings.

It is from this perspective that we view the significance of the revitalization and refashioning of United Nations organs to keep abreast of the rapid development of international relations. In this context, Kuwait is following closely the ongoing discussions in the Open-Ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council. We had hoped that consensus would have been reached on the restructuring and reform of the Security Council to coincide with the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations last year. Failure to attain that goal so far should not dampen our hopes. Rather, we should redouble our efforts towards that end. Our aim should be a Security

Council whose work and procedures are more transparent. Its resolutions should reflect more faithfully the will of the universal membership of the United Nations. Its composition should be expanded to reflect the recent increase in membership, sovereign equality among States and the equitable geographical distribution of seats among the various regional groups.

Any reform of the Security Council must in the end ensure collective efforts by both members of the Council and other members of the international community to respect and implement its resolutions. The Council should be able to demonstrate its firm resolve against any regime that does not comply with Council resolutions.

A textbook case in point is the just position towards the Iraqi regime adopted by the Council and supported by the international community as a whole. As recently as 23 June 1996, leaders of Arab States, in the final statement issued at the end of the extraordinary Arab Summit in Cairo, urged the Iraqi Government:

> "not to embark on any aggressive policies aimed at provoking its Arab neighbours and to implement in full all the relevant Security Council resolutions and especially those requiring it to take the necessary measures to release all Kuwaiti and third-country prisoners and detainees, to return the property seized and to comply with the compensation mechanism. They regard this as the right way to ensure that the sanctions imposed on Iraq are lifted and the appropriate conditions created for Iraq to resume its role in the inter-Arab regional order." (*A/50/986, appendix, p. 7*)

This statement shows a recognition by the Arab leaders of the nature of the Iraqi regime and their appreciation for the importance of the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. Hence, Iraq must cooperate sincerely with the International Committee of the Red Cross in order to account for all Kuwaiti and third-country prisoners and detainees, so that the chapter on this human tragedy can be closed. We must note with regret here that the Tripartite Commission, which meets every three months in Geneva, and its Technical Subcommittee, which meets monthly on issues relating to the border between Iraq and Kuwait, have so far gotten nowhere. In point of fact, the Iraqi regime exploits such meetings for propaganda purposes.

I must reiterate here that this question of prisoners and hostages remains a human tragedy precipitated by the Iraqi regime. And it remains a top-priority humanitarian issue for the people and Government of Kuwait.

The Iraqi regime is legally bound to cooperate with the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) in eliminating its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. UNSCOM's bitter experience shows that the Iraqi regime will not pass up any opportunity to use it for deception, misinformation and the concealment of required data. It even went so far as to block repeatedly the work of UNSCOM inspectors as recently as March, June and August of this year, thus prompting the Security Council to adopt resolution 1060 (1996) in addition to presidential statements issued by way of warning to the Iraqi regime.

Kuwait, keen as it is on ensuring the safety and stability of the region, supports UNSCOM efforts. Indeed, we commend UNSCOM for its resolve and its insistence on the absolute necessity of implementing all provisions relating to the liquidation of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Given the human suffering of the brotherly people of Iraq emanating from the policies of the ruling regime, Kuwait continues to provide humanitarian relief assistance in kind to the Iraqi refugees. We also welcomed the accord reached between Iraq and the United Nations on the implementation of Security Council resolution 986 (1995) as a step forward towards alleviating the suffering of the Iraqi people.

Let me take this occasion to reiterate Kuwait's position that Iraq's unity and territorial integrity must be preserved. In the meantime, we understand — indeed appreciate — all measures taken by the Coalition States in order to ensure the full implementation by Iraq of all relevant Security Council resolutions. The essence and thrust of these resolutions is the evolution of a regional order anchored in the established principles of justice and stability, the rule of law, observance of the norms of international behaviour, and respect for international treaties, at the core of which is the Charter of the United Nations.

In view of Kuwait's concern for peace and security in the Arabian Gulf region, and by virtue of our close relations with our sister State, the United Arab Emirates, and with our friendly neighbour, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kuwait associates itself with the position of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) regarding the issue of the islands. Kuwait calls upon the two parties to continue

their negotiations in a bid to reach a just and peaceful settlement through dialogue.

On another regional matter, Kuwait fully supports the sister State of Bahrain in the recent measures it took to combat terrorism with a view to consolidating its security and stability. Our position is in harmony with the principle that the GCC member States have a common destiny, and their security and stability are therefore indivisible.

Kuwait has been following with grave concern the stalling of the Middle East peace process following the election of a new Government in Israel, which adopted a series of positions that contradict the arrangements worked out in Madrid, primarily the land-for-peace formula and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) towards a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The recent Cairo summit document underscored the adherence by the Arab States to the peace process, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of a just and comprehensive peace, as a strategic option under the umbrella of international law. The Arab position requires a matching commitment by Israel to work in a sincere and forthright fashion all the way through until the overall peace process is completed. This must include the restoration of rights and the return of occupied territories, as well as ensuring security and a strategic balance of all States of the region, in accordance with the principles laid down in Madrid.

For the record, let me recall in this context that Kuwait put the question of Palestine among its top concerns. In point of fact, that issue has been central to our relations with other members of the international community. We have channelled enormous effort and resources into this cause, since Kuwait has always believed that Israel has not recognized the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood — let alone the fact that it has seized Palestinian territory in total disregard of United Nations resolutions and by using force as a means of imposing *faits accomplis*. We demand that the Israeli Government stop its settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, especially in the Holy City of Jerusalem, and that it cease forthwith all changes to its Arab character and legal status. The refugee problem must also be resolved according to United Nations resolutions. Finally, a Palestinian state must be established with Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the will of the Palestinian people.

In this context, we condemn the steps taken by Israel in commissioning and excavating a tunnel under the western wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This constitutes a desecration of that holy site and is a provocation to the people of Palestine — indeed to all Arabs and Muslims throughout the world. The use of great force and violence by Israel has left many people dead or wounded. We demand that Israel put an immediate end to these practices and that it fulfil its obligations to preserve the Arabic and Islamic character of these holy places.

Lasting and comprehensive peace requires mutual accommodation of the parties' rights, compliance with accords concluded, action in good faith, avoidance of provocative acts, and long-term vision — all with a view not to inflict injury on any major party to the peace equation.

Withdrawal by Israel from the Golan is a litmus test of its good intentions to achieve a just and balanced peace. Therefore, Kuwait supports Syria's position that negotiations should resume from the point at which they ceased, in view of the fact that the peace process is a continuum that should not stop before reaching its ultimate destination.

Kuwait also supports Lebanon in its legitimate insistence that Israel must fulfil all provisions of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), under which Israel must withdraw fully and unconditionally from all Lebanese territory under occupation.

We believe that, in the final analysis, world peace is indivisible and that consequently, the question of global security has worldwide ramifications. Hence we think that the issues of ethnic strife and civil war should remain on the international agenda. Thus, we welcome the peaceful measures taken thus far in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina with a view to bringing that tragedy to an end while ensuring that the people of that Republic are accorded their legitimate rights. We also welcome the outcome of the recently held elections there and congratulate President Alija Izetbegović on the well-deserved confidence placed in him.

We also call upon the international community to pursue its efforts towards ending the current tragedies that afflict Somalia, Afghanistan and Burundi. In the same vein, we hope that the peoples of those countries will be responsive to the efforts of the international community.

Kuwait notes with satisfaction the success of the United Nations earlier this month in the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which is the culmination of a long-standing universal effort and of hopes for a safer world. Indeed, the CTBT represents an essential step forward on the path towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Cooperation among member States of the international community in the economic and trade spheres has engendered a welcome openness following the conclusion of the world free trade agreement. We hope that this accord will expand the volume of the developing countries' exports to the world markets. Kuwait was in the vanguard of advocating the removal of trade barriers simply because we believe that, in the context of an interdependent globe, collective political security cannot be isolated from the economic concerns of nations. Against this background, we welcome the steps already taken by some developing countries to readjust their economic approaches towards genuine openness and the adoption of free-market policies. In our view, this type of restructuring will help attract foreign investments and accelerate the transfer of technology, which, in the end, will foster international economic relations in terms of generating a freer cash flow, a better investment environment and an increase in joint ventures.

Kuwait believes in the need to harness human energies to narrow the gaps that exist among nations, based on a common understanding of the tenets that underpin world security and economic well-being. We also believe that dialogue and the tolerant exchange of views, coupled with sincere and determined joint action, will lay a solid foundation for improved international relations. Under this scenario, the good forces will combine to neutralize the evil ones; the "haves" and the "have-nots" might stand a better chance of interacting beneficially; reason and prudence will reign supreme, while the outlaws, saboteurs and vicious tyrants will continue to lose ground. In the end, living conditions will improve under a new world order based on the principles of justice, which promote peace and security for all.

The Acting President: I now call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, His Excellency Mr. Boris Shihmuradov.

Mr. Shihmuradov (Turkmenistan): Allow me, first of all, to congratulate Mr. Razali Ismail, as a representative of a State with which Turkmenistan has exceptionally warm relations, on the occasion of his election to this high post. I should like also to express confidence that his vast diplomatic experience in close association with the United Nations will enable him to effectively guide the work of the current session, which is called upon to accomplish a number of historic objectives.

The President's opening statement reaffirms that our expectations will come true. Here, I should like to express our appreciation to Mr. Freitas do Amaral for his work during the preceding session of the General Assembly, which has become an integral part of Turkmenistan's history by dint of its unanimous adoption of the resolution on the permanent neutrality of my country. Speaking from this rostrum on the eve of the adoption of that resolution, His Excellency Saparmurad Niyazov, President of Turkmenistan, emphasized that Turkmenistan would take all the necessary steps to reaffirm its complete adherence to the principles of the United Nations by making a constructive contribution to the stabilization of the situation in our strife-torn region, by peace-building and by serving the interests of cooperation within our region and at the inter-regional level. During the past year, Turkmenistan has taken steps to achieve this goal by playing host to three rounds of talks between Tajik factions in Ashgabat, by providing assistance to the Mission of the Secretary-General's special envoy for Afghanistan, and by hosting a number of major international forums.

Having entered the world community of nations as an independent State on the eve of the twenty-first century, Turkmenistan, like other countries, has found itself facing the need to accept the challenge of the times so typical of the turn of centuries. That is why we have focused our efforts on the international arena, striving to become part of the worldwide process with its new trends towards unity based on national statehood and sovereignty. A policy of constructive neutrality has become our response to the challenge of the epoch.

Turkmenistan is an Asian country whose destiny has been to become one of the actors involved in the all-European process. We view this factor as a unique chance to cooperate with the Europeans within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union and other organizations, and to promote better understanding and the improvement of North-South cooperation.

Today the international community confronts problems requiring new approaches and innovative

decisions, profound analysis and forecasting. In this respect, we would like to propose that, under the auspices of the United Nations, an international centre for political studies be established in Turkmenistan that would carry out studies on the political and economic situation in our region. The work of the centre should correspond to the new geopolitical realities, and the centre should have the task of elaborating specific strategic recommendations in the interests of global peace and security. It is no secret that analysing a situation from a distance often leads to incorrect conclusions and projections.

Confrontation between blocs has become a thing of the past. Today geo-economic regions have emerged as the main actors in the political arena. Classifying States according to their size and might, which infringes on the interests of small and medium-size States, has become obsolete. Within the existing system of international relations, all States should be able to structure themselves within the framework of universally accepted rules, but they should do so according to their own tenets and principles. It is in this context that we support the initiatives aimed at introducing appropriate changes in the functioning of the United Nations, its bodies and sister organizations.

The United Nations Charter stipulates that the Security Council bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. We share the view that today the notion of security has undergone a radical transformation and includes an entire set of equally important political, economic, environmental, social, military and other components. Proceeding from this assumption, we endorse the proposal that membership of this main body of the United Nations should be enlarged, within reasonable limits, so that it may ensure that this international process is manageable and controllable. Of equal importance is the question of balanced and adequate representation in the Security Council of States from both the North and the South.

Today's Turkmenistan is a country with a transitional economy undergoing profound social and political changes. In this respect, we hope that "An Agenda for Development" will be finalized during the current session, which will help to establish a system of priorities and assistance to States pursuing such national development programmes. It is hardly possible to overestimate the role of the United Nations, because it is precisely this mechanism that should ensure the utmost objectivity and tolerance towards such processes. Newly independent States did not emerge out of a vacuum. Each one possesses its own specific features, unique national and geographic characteristics, historical ties and psychological patterns. Each one has the right to choose its own model of development and State system.

Proceeding from this assumption, we support the view that diversity is integral to the world. However, though all States are subject to international law, the aspirations of all for development and prosperity cannot be programmed according to a single standard or world view. The main challenge of the twenty-first century is to ensure that all Members of the United Nations can look at one another from the point of view of unity in diversity. We are therefore grateful to the United Nations and to States possessing global political and economic potential for their support and understanding.

Turkmenistan possesses colossal natural resources. It has one of the richest deposits of hydrocarbons in the world — I refer to the Caspian basin as well as to other areas of my country. One of the major tasks facing us is the establishment of a pipeline infrastructure that, in conjunction with the existing system, will ensure supply of our gas to Europe and Asia. We are glad that Turkmenistan's interests as an exporter coincide with the interests of European and Asian consumers. We are happy that neighbouring countries — Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, Turkey, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakstan — do not have any differences with respect to this issue.

In this context I would like to touch on several issues relating to the Caspian Sea. Turkmenistan, like all littoral States, is concerned about its future and the prospects for its resources. We believe that there is no place for unilateral decisions or dictates on this issue. What is required is the establishment of a system of full trust and interaction among the Caspian Sea States for the sake of the common interests and prosperity of each individual State. The forthcoming Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Caspian States to be held in Ashgabat will serve as the forum for discussion of all those problems and will prepare a platform for a Caspian summit meeting.

Turkmenistan is opposed to any military activity in the Caspian Sea. It wishes to ensure a regime of free navigation with respect to the national borders of every littoral State. The wealth of the Caspian Sea, its unique biological and mineral structure and fragile ecological system call for a comprehensive and balanced approach, free from short-term profit or political advantage. We do not doubt that all Caspian Sea States will be able to find

the best alternative on the basis of common sense and respect for the interests of each country involved in the name of the common goal of peace and security.

There is one area of cooperation with the United Nations in which Turkmenistan has a special interest: the struggle against drug distribution and trafficking. Turkmenistan is waging a relentless fight against this evil and has established a State coordination commission. At the beginning of this year Turkmenistan joined the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances and the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. Turkmenistan attaches great importance to its cooperation with the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, and has signed a bilateral agreement with it. In May 1996 Turkmenistan, together with other countries of Central Asia, and in cooperation with the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, signed a memorandum on regional cooperation concerning control of illegal production, trafficking and abuse of narcotic drugs. We need to make extraordinary efforts in order to control the situation, roll back the spiral of evil and reverse the situation whereby the problem of drugs grows in proportion to the efforts made to combat it.

Turkmenistan is actively cooperating with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations in developing democratic processes so as to bring up new generations free from the old psychological stereotypes and doubtful ideological values. Democracy, human rights, people's rights to property and legal protection are all universal notions. However, it is not enough simply to understand their relevance; it is necessary to implement them in real life once and for all. What we need is patience and time to allow such understanding to be translated into practical reality. That is why Turkmenistan has created an institute for democracy, human rights and statehood development, which is called upon to develop its own model of a democratic society, relying on the best European and Asian experiences and drawing on the knowledge of international experts. One does not have to be a specialist in order to understand that, no matter how perfect a model proposed from outside may seem, it might not be effective when applied to a traditional Oriental society such as exists in Turkmenistan, a country that has inherited values from ancient civilizations and the culture of Islam. There is also a specific mentality among its people, who have for centuries fought for their survival and have eventually acquired the chance to be independent and have their own national identity.

The agenda of the current session includes an item dealing with the development of cooperation between the United Nations and its bodies and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). During the last summit of that organization, which was held in May 1996 in the capital of Turkmenistan, my country assumed the presidency for the next two-year period, and it intends to exert every effort necessary to implement the large-scale programmes of this organization, which now comprises 10 countries.

The ECO is a purely economic organization with no political strings attached. It members share a common view on this matter. Similarly, we believe that only the acceleration of economic development and the improvement of cooperation among States can bring well-being and prosperity to the peoples of the region. However, a number of political preconditions are indispensable for developing economic interaction so that it can be effective and fruitful. I believe that a climate of political trust is the first requirement. If such a climate becomes a constant factor in our relations, it will contribute to the advancement of new, bold initiatives and specific projects. To put it plainly, we must profess a philosophy of mutual understanding and trust. It is only under such conditions that our projects can be successfully implemented. That is especially important because conflict situations persist in the ECO region, in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Turkmenistan firmly believes that these two ancient and wise peoples are capable of overcoming the syndrome of lingering mistrust and difference. We fully support the initiative of the United Nations and the efforts of neighbouring countries aimed at a peaceful settlement.

As for Afghanistan, we consider it important that the conflict there has moved from being in a category of forgotten conflicts to the centre of international efforts. By conducting constant consultations with the leaders of neighbouring countries and the Secretary-General, the President of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, has expressed Turkmenistan's readiness to take an active part in the search for an Afghan settlement. The fate of many global economic projects hinges on peace in Afghanistan, in particular the supply of energy resources to actively developing energy markets in Asia.

Next month Turkmenistan will celebrate the fifth anniversary of its independence. Today we can discern more clearly the perspectives and understand better in what areas we should develop cooperation with foreign partners. We can clearly see and evaluate the situation at home, in the region and the rest of the world. Accumulated experience enables us to say that Turkmenistan has found its place in the international community, both politically and economically. By consistently and progressively moving towards the democratization of our society and the establishment of market mechanisms in the economy, our State is becoming integrated into the worldwide process. By closely interacting with foreign partners and pursuing a vigorous foreign policy, we are confident that these tasks will be implemented promptly and efficiently.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.